

Leading a Positive Transformation
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What form of positive transformation do we envisage for Protestant Unionist Loyalist communities?

What role can the Democratic Unionist Party play in that transformation.

The formation of the Community Convention and Development Company the creation of a government task force on working-class Protestant communities show that there are problems in many of our communities. What was once denied by government is now more generally accepted although there are still some within the voluntary sector who live in a state of denial about this and the factors that have contributed to it.

Today we are looking at how we can lead positive transformation from where we are, with all its problems, to where we want to be, with all its possibilities.

Our objective should surely be the creation of communities that are **confident, coherent and competent.**

That means they should be **confident** of who they are, confident of where they want to go and how they will get there. I believe there is an issue around community confidence and that is not surprising after the trauma of thirty years of violence, political uncertainty and republican psychological warfare. How often have we been told by republicans that a United Ireland is 'inevitable'?

They should be **coherent** and have a real sense of community but often we find that PUL communities are fragmented and factionalised. They are marked more by competition than co-operation. In that regard the convention model is especially important as it draws together all the strands within the PUL community to work together on developing and implementing a common vision.

Thirdly they should be **competent** and have the competencies, skills and resources, both physical and human, to develop themselves as communities.

If we are working to positively transform communities towards that vision, it is important, right at the start, to identify the issues and areas where there are problems and where transformation is required. Today I want to pick up on just two or three of the key issues.

One of the most important issues is education. Protestantism always placed a high value on education and in days when educational provision was very limited, the great Protestant Reformer John Knox wanted a school in every parish.

In Northern Ireland we produce some of the best-qualified young people in the British Isles. Unfortunately many of them leave these shores to study and do not return while others study in local universities and then move away.

That brain-drain is especially noticeable in unionist communities and is something that must be addressed. There is no single answer to this problem but one thing must be the ethos of our local universities. Is there a chill factor in a university or a students union that deters young Protestants from applying? That is just one of many questions to be asked.

In many communities there is also a serious problem of educational underachievement and young people are leaving school with no qualifications and low levels of literacy and numeracy.

However our thinking on education should not be confined to formal education. We have some excellent community education initiatives but there is a need for many more.

The various loyalist **paramilitary organisations** continue to operate in many of our communities but there is a growing realisation within their ranks that the days of paramilitarism are coming to an end. There has been much debate about how the members of those organisations can be moved away from the past and that is ongoing. In different organisations it seems to have reached different stages. However, I believe that many of them want to move away and the debate is to be encouraged.

Professor Putnam has spoken about the importance of **social capital** and already within our communities there is much good social capital. We have many churches, both large and small, offering a wide range of programmes and activities in addition to their core spiritual work; we have the various Loyal Orders, we have a network of credit unions, we have a wide range of community and cultural organisations and we have political parties. Together we must work to strengthen the social capital and all of us have a role to play.

Cultural development has an important role to play in developing PUL communities. It is often said by our political opponents that our communities have an 'identity crisis' of that we have no culture.

There is much good work already underway through the Loyal Orders, including the Maiden City Festival in Londonderry and the formation of the Orange Community Network. This is a network of Orange halls that want to re-establish these halls as centres of community and cultural activity for the wider PUL community and not just for their own members. In that regard the announcement of de-rating for Orange halls that are open to this wider use is an important step, as it will remove a financial burden and release money for developmental work in the halls.

There is also the valuable work of the Ulster-Scots movement and that covers both the core Ulster-Scots organisations, especially the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council and its

member groups, and the many community groups who now participate in Ulster-Scots activities.

In regard to culture schools also have a role to play and while Roman Catholic and Irish medium schools impart a strong sense of cultural identity to the children, it seems that in many controlled schools there is a nervousness about this. We have been talking to the department of education and other about this because at present many Protestant young people emerge from the education system 'deculturised' and knowing little about the history, heritage and culture of their community.

In recent years there has been a growing emphasis in Northern Ireland on **equality and human rights**, with the creation of an Equality Commission and a Human Rights Commission.

However PUL communities have tended to shy away from these issues and nationalists and republicans have largely taken over that ground, using both the equality agenda and the human rights agenda to further their own ends.

The situation has been made more difficult by the composition of the commissions themselves, which are supposed to reflect the wider community but fail to do so.

Nevertheless we should have not fear of equality and human rights. Indeed we should claim the ground and actively embrace both the equality agenda and the human rights agenda. We can even say that it was our forefathers in the Glorious Revolution and the Scottish Enlightenment who were among the first to establish these principles.

In recent weeks the DUP has submitted to the government a very long document on a wide range of issues. Some of these are confidence-building measures but many are **equality** issues, which have a confidence-building role. Indeed more and more we are using the word 'equality' in this aspect of our work.

There are also international **human rights** obligations that we must ensure are enacted in a fair and equitable manner for all.

What is the role of the DUP and indeed other unionist parties in this?